

April 14, 2016

Re: Testimony on decreasing the use of Seclusion and Restraint in Michigan schools.

Dear Michigan House of Education Committee Members,

My name is Debbie Rock and I am the parent of a 14 year old boy on the Autism spectrum with Asperger's syndrome, with a nonverbal learning disorder and ADD Inattentive.

F. O. R. "—" W. A. R. D.

That was the word that my son, Robert, placed on his game board project in art class when he was in 6th grade that invoked another student to bully my developmentally disabled son into a physical altercation for the first time in his school career.

This incident led to a three day proverbial wrestling match with our school district which was set on disciplining my son using seclusion in the form of an "in-school" suspension which is not fully supervised. After discussions with school staff, that led to discussions with the local ISD, I had no other recourse but to call MDE-OSE who in turn connected me to the office of seclusion and restraint. I was told during this conversation that unless there was going to be staff in the room at all times or someone that could make contact with my special needs son at all times, that it could not be done. I was sent a copy of the MARSE rules with which I became fast familiar with.

I sent emails to school staff explaining the MARSE rules and provided insight to staff on the cognitive processing of my son if he were to sit in a 5' x 6' room for an entire school day. It would have been a form of mental torture, especially for one on the autism spectrum and there would have been no way to keep him on task and focused on any school work for that entire time. I stated that although I was in favor of holding my son accountable for his actions, bullied into them or not, I was not comfortable with him doing this form of seclusion without the proper supervision and assurance that he would learn something from his mistake. In this day and age we've become accustomed to throwing the book at a child who makes a mistake rather than guiding them through a clearly teachable moment.

At 9:00pm the day before he was to serve the "in-school" suspension I got a call from school staff telling me that there was no way they could guarantee that staff would be able to either be in the room all day with my son or maintain eye contact at all times. I suggested an "out-of-school" suspension and they agreed to.

The next day I kept Robert out of school. I called a retired friend who has a son that had been a bully himself and in lots of trouble in school. My son spent the day with this gentleman who talked to Robert about the altercation in school and how his own son turned things around and became a corrections officer.

My son learned a valuable lesson that day, one that he wouldn't have learned sitting in a seclusion room. I did not focus on discipline and I did not engage in a reactive approach to changing his behavior. I was proactive in my approach to teach him to become a better person.

There are better ways than seclusion and restraint. By bringing in a community member, an opportunity was given to mentor this child through a life changing experience that used this incident to teach proper behavior in a positive way, not punitive.

I'm asking all of you today to move Michigan forward by decreasing the use of seclusion and restraint in our schools in order to keep our kids safe. Promote positive behavior intervention and support so that our children learn valuable life lessons and skills that will carry them through to adulthood.

If you would like to contact me in regards to this testimony I can be reached at (989) 292-0871.

Thank you,

Deborah L. Rock
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